

The Negro in Slavery Days

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AS I look about me and see men of the North and men of the South, men who are black and men who are white, men who wore the gray and men who wore the blue, coming here to study and discuss this problem with which we are all concerned, whether white or black, or North or South, I cannot but



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express the regret that we did not have wisdom enough, forty years ago, for black men and white men, the southern and northern men, to talk as we are talking to-day, disagree it may be upon unessentials, but I am sure we shall agree upon the fundamental things connected with the work.

It is not too late, and I am very glad we are here, white men and black men, southern and northern men, to talk over this question as Christian men.

For here we have the key to the situation; for if here in America we cannot settle righteously and settle justly the relations between man and man, if Christianity does not do this for us here, what have we to carry to the peoples beyond the seas? This is our question, for it is unique and, please God, this will be but the beginning of what shall come and what shall be said, — not the fiery remarks that sometimes come out of the hearts of hatred of the black and white men, but study and question alike and asking God to lead us in the right way.

Acquainted with the Negro of To-Day

I am a little bit more acquainted with the Negro of to-day than with the Negro of yesterday, but I think, perhaps, I might speak on the Negro of to-day something that might be of interest to you. Let me once more, for I am manufacturing my address on my feet, apologize, for I have been very, very busy since the chairman wrote me, and for the first time I have appeared before an important body without a prepared address. Let me say just what is in my heart as I look over this audience and see these men and women, some engaged in work in the South, who, all

these years, during the time when most needed, have been at work when the people of the South did not see their way clear to take hold of this work. I want to thank God for their presence here to-day. I feel that I should take my shoes from off my feet before men and women like these; one, a man at the head of a school for thirty years, sometimes misunderstood; he and his good wife were there and their work speaks for them. And here are some good ladies here who work in the girls' seminaries at Atlanta. Those black women of the South need those women there. I take off my hat to them, and I want to say, here and now, that which I have said again and again. If in the next few years I shall hold some such relations to the great educational plan as I hold now, it shall be my highest delight to take the leadership of these schools among the black people, and give them to southern people who happen to be white.

Slavery Did Much for the Negro

Now, Mr. Chairman, slavery did something for the Negro. It did much for the Negro. It took him out of his barbaric state. It made of him a thinking man. It took away something of his superstition. It gave him some perception of himself. It put him in a new environment among the Christian races in all the world's history, and with that environment he set himself to work. I think it is fair to say that slavery looked after the physical man a little more than after the spiritual man, for I think nothing is going to be gained from this Conference unless we look the truth squarely in the face as far as we have been able to see it. I think that you have part of the problem here.

As I look over these men, I realize that the physical condition was looked after better than the spiritual condition. I do not hesitate to say this; I wish some of the regard for the physical condition of the black that existed in those days were facts to-day. If so, he would be out in the country upon the farms where he ought to be, instead of being very largely in the large cities, crowded into unsanitary houses, and left to die of consumption. I would wish that the physical condition was looked after a little more to-day than it is.

The Spiritual Condition of the Black Man

But the spiritual condition of the black man was not looked after very carefully. There are exceptions. Of course there are. There were religious slave holders who felt it their duty to give spiritual training to their slaves and help them, and in many